

## **Review of Love and Justice Month**

February 12 to March 13 2009 was 'Love and Justice' Month at Oxford Brookes. The Month included a number of firsts for equalities within the University. It was the first time we'd:

- Attempted anything more than a week of events and delivered such a wide range of activities under a common theme.
- Looked to engage people with a theme and strong visual image that went beyond the traditional one of 'equal opportunities and diversity'
- Had staff from outside the equalities team so actively engaged in the organisation and delivery of an EOD led initiative
- Worked so closely with the Students Union
- Delivered EO events in partnership with external organisations

This paper provides a brief review of the month and its organisation and makes suggestions for the future.

### **Events and attendance**

The month coincided with the University's annual Human Rights Film Festival and the national Fairtrade Fortnight. Both of these were advertised and promoted in the Love and Justice events leaflet. The University also hosted the Oxford Inspires Cultural Platform at which both the Vice Chancellor and Chancellor spoke and referenced the month.

It is estimated that around 1000 people were directly involved in the 'love and justice' elements of the month, either by attending an event or through entering one of the competitions. Participants included students and staff from Oxford Brookes and Oxford University, Brooke's alumni, local residents, voluntary and charitable organisations, schools and the business community, with the majority of events attracting a mixture of the groups.

As well as the 1000 directly involved many 100's more people saw the poetry and photography displays, ate the Love and Justice sandwiches and/or fortune cookies (all of which included quotes on the theme) saw the book displays in Blackwell's and Waterstone's in Oxford or heard or read something about the month thanks to the strong promotional support we received from the local media. (The month as a whole or some aspect of it was featured on Brookes TV, Jack FM, Fox FM and BBC Radio Oxford and in the Oxford Mail and the Oxford Times). In addition the Love and Justice leaflet was distributed at 50 information points in Oxford, was mailed to every school in Oxfordshire, to Oxford Colleges, Councils, residents and community associations and was sent directly to 20,000 residents via its insertion in the Oxford Times.

The month launched with the volunteer fair, ended with awards to the poetry and photography competition winners and encompassed, amongst other things, film, debate, a Nicaraguan evening (organised in conjunction with the Oxford International Women's festival), book groups, an interfaith forum

(organised by Oxford City Council) and employment focused workshops for staff.

Events that deserve a special mention due to levels of interest and positive feedback are the poetry and photography competition, the volunteer fair and the student union debate. The last of these was a huge success and provides a perfect example of how these events can be organised. HR provided funding and guidance to the debating society who undertook the organisation and promotion of the debate.

Attendance at events varied, with some attracting much larger audiences than others but feedback from all the events was positive. Many of the comments focused on how the variety and range of events demonstrated that Brookes was engaging with the issues of equality and justice in a thoughtful and creative way that went beyond the traditional 'diversity' workshops, as Dr Wolfgang Zumdick, who judged and presented the awards for the photography competition commented:

*"I am here tonight because I had the luck to be here as a visiting research fellow in the Arts Department at the right time. It's also lucky that a university tries to go beyond its daily institutional and research work by having events like this. It shows that a university is also a living being, an organism. It is creative events like this that show how agile people are who are working here and how alive this organism is. A university is mainly a pool of creativity and these human resources should also be used for creating the body of the institution. When I heard first about the theme of this exhibition, I thought: how inspiring!*

*Love and justice ...*

*Normally we think about these two terms in contrast to each other – In a way, **justice**, in our minds is always more connected to the coldness of an institutional process. **Love** is something very intimate, something that creates warmth. But whenever things, in opposition, come together – they create fields of tension and a certain energy – first perhaps intellectual, but then, if you follow the trace and live into these words, this tension also provokes a great deal of rich imaginative thought"*

## **Organisation**

A working group that included staff from all areas of the University was set up in July 2008 to organise the month. This supported the event being viewed as a University initiative rather than just an equalities one, helped in the generation of ideas for events and created awareness of the month and links with individual staff and groups of staff (e.g. the Students Union, Corporate Relations, the Communications team and Estates) that were invaluable in the development of the month. However after the initial meeting half of the working group failed to turn up to any further meetings and the organisation fell on a much smaller group of committed staff. Not all the events originally planned took place. Those that did were, in the main, generic in that they weren't focusing on any particular equality strand and were organised, developed and promoted centrally by core members of the working group. At

the initial meeting interest was also expressed in running events that could be linked to a specific theme or strand (e.g. LGBT history month and faith) and it was agreed that, in order to ensure the work was shared, organisation of these events would be undertaken by individuals (both from inside and outside the group) with particular interest in these areas. Unfortunately the majority of these events, for a variety of reasons, did not get organised or were organised too late to be included in the Love and Justice calendar.

### **What next?**

Using feedback obtained from event organisers and attendees and members of the original working group the following recommendations and suggestions are made for future events:

- We have a strong and recognisable image in 'Love and Justice' that could be used as an umbrella for future diversity and equality events
- Organisational capacity is such that, were the University to decide it would like to run a similar event in the future, we would recommend making this a bi-annual rather than annual event (so the next Love and Justice month would be 2011)
- Ensure we have a clear remit and goal for the month
- The timing of the month is good and offers synergies with other events but we should...
- Start the organisation earlier to ensure we can develop a strong programme of events and have time to attract high quality speakers. It may even be worth starting to consider ideas for speakers and events towards the end of this year,
- Continue to organise the event via a working group that includes all relevant areas but be specific about what members of the group will be expected to contribute and ensure that individuals who agree to be members understand and accept the commitment they are making
- Publicise the month widely outside the working group to encourage contributions from other people/groups. Be very clear about what can be provided centrally, what the organisers will need to do and provide time scales and deadlines up front.
- Design an evaluation forms for event organisers so we can more formally review the success of individual events
- Some events such as the volunteer fair could be repeated, others, such as the poetry & photography competition could also run again but with a different theme.

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